

## POLITICAL PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCING IN SURINAME<sup>1</sup>

*John R.P. Krishnadath*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Suriname is located on the northeastern part of South America. As such it is also the most eastern located member country of the Caricom. The total land area is about 163,000km<sup>2</sup> and for 95% covered with rainforest. It has approximately 480,000 inhabitants of which two third live in the Capital Paramaribo. Roughly 61% of the inhabitants of Suriname are 18years and older and are therefore eligible to vote in an election. The figures of the 2000 elections show that 49% of the total number of voters lives in the nation's capital.

Suriname's is a country with many ethnic groups of which the Creoles, Hindustani's and Javanese are the largest ethnic groups and some smaller ones such as Maroons (descendants of rebel slaves who escaped to the jungle and can be distinguished in 7 tribes), Chinese, Amer-Indians, Lebanese, Syrians, Whites, Mixed and others. Besides the official language, which is Dutch, and Surinamese (a contact language) each ethnic group speaks its own language. This ethnic factor is except for a few parties also the basis on which they are formed and operate.

In Suriname all parties that were founded between 1947 and 1949, were in fact solely founded on the basis of ethnicity and one on religion and ethnicity, but still with an overall majority belonging to one specific ethnic group. The parties in question are The National Party Suriname (NPS), which predominantly had Creoles<sup>2</sup> and Mulattos<sup>3</sup> as their supporters, the United Indians Party<sup>4</sup> (VHP) with East Indians (descendants of indentured laborers of India), the Party of Indonesian Farmers<sup>5</sup> (KTPI) with Javanese (descendants of indentured laborers from Java) and the Progressive Surinamese Peoples party (PSV) with Roman Catholic, Creole and Mulatto supporters. Till the end of the seventies these parties have dominated the political scene -in terms of getting their candidates elected, or being part of the than ruling governments- in Suriname. Polls conducted over the last 14 years in Suriname indicate that with a few exceptions, belonging to a specific ethnic group is still the most important factor to support a political party. Labels such as left and right, ideological differences and the like are throughout the history of our political parties, hardly applicable on Surinamese parties. In the last one and a half decade we refer to "Old" and "New" politics in order to make a distinction between parties from old and those founded after 1986.

---

<sup>1</sup> The opinions expressed in this document do not reflect the official position of the Organization of American States.

<sup>2</sup> Creole in Suriname refers to all descendants from African Slaves. It distinguishes from African descents living in the hinterland (jungle) of Suriname (Marooned slaves).

<sup>3</sup> Mulattos are light colored Surinamese.

<sup>4</sup> The VHP has kept their acronym over the last 55 years, but changed on two occasions the words that stand for the acronym in what it is called nowadays the: Progressive Reform Party

<sup>5</sup> The KTPI also kept is Acronym but changed its meaning into Party for National Unity and Solidarity (in Javanese)

Since voting mostly went and in fact still takes place along ethnic lines, the Surinamese electoral system developed itself accordingly. The current electoral system is a “electoral district” based proportional system using the largest average formula and preferential vote, through which members of the National Assembly will be chosen and an “electoral district” based majority system through which members of the resort councils are chosen. Based on this system 51 members will be chosen for the National Assembly which is a unicameral body, 712 members will be chosen for the resort councils and 106 members will be appointed as member of the district councils<sup>6</sup>. Elections for both the National Assembly and the resort councils take place at the same day. The elected and appointed members for the National Assembly, the resort and district councils will form the United People Assembly in case of e.g. the election of a president and vice-president can’t be finalized in two voting rounds in the National Assemblé.

The electoral system is, and always has been criticized since it allows over, respectively under representation of those living in the city and the district on the one hand and it over, respectively “undervalues” votes of voters in districts with a majority of voters from one or the other ethnic group. These “imbalances” however, have never been enough of an argument for a political party in Suriname to withdraw from participating in elections. It must be said that parties which supporters reflects the ethnic ratio’s in Suriname will raise other arguments for districts being over or undervalued, than parties which are mainly based on the support of one ethnic group.

Another point of discussion and one of the arguments to change the Surinamese Constitution has to do with the position and the interpretation of the executive power of the president. According to article 55.2 of the Constitution<sup>7</sup>, the National Assembly is the highest institution of the state. In article 90 and 116.2 it is furthermore stated that the president, respectively the government<sup>8</sup> is answerable to the National Assembly. It is also the National Assembly that will elect a president and vice president and convene a United Peoples Assembly when needed. These articles in the constitution indicate that the executive is accountable to the National Assembly. The constitution on the other hand makes clear that the president is the head of state. He appoints his Ministers and he alone has the right to dismiss the 13 members of the Council of Ministers. This ambiguity in the Constitution and lack of ability or unwillingness of the National Assembly to hold the executive accountable gives room to an indirectly chosen president to interpret article 110<sup>9</sup> of the constitution in his “favor” and expand his already considerable executive power. These contradictions in the constitution and the “freedom” to interpret aforesaid article, give room for discussions whether one should speak of a parliamentary or quasi-parliamentary or presidential or quasi-presidential system. Although the National Assembly who elects the president and vice – president do have the right to also expel them (article 74.a), it’s not clear how many votes are needed for such an act.

---

<sup>6</sup> The composition of the District Council takes place after elections for Resort Councils have been held in the district. The seats for District Council are assigned to the political organizations represented in the Resort Councils of the district concerned, as a proportion of the total number of seats obtained in the Resort Councils.

<sup>7</sup> See Constitution of Suriname; December 18, 1987.

<sup>8</sup> In article 116.1 of the Constitution of Suriname, the Government is defined as the President, Vice-president and his Cabinet of Minister.

<sup>9</sup> Article 110 mentions the power of the president with regard to other organs.

The National Assembly furthermore shares legislative power with the government, since they draft and propose laws to be implemented by the National Assembly<sup>10</sup>. Ressort and district councils who are accountable to the minister of Regional Affairs play a marginal role, except for the occasion in which the National Assembly is unable to elect a president and vice president. Their numbers make it possible that in the case in which there is more than one candidate for president and vice president, to elect a president other than the candidate of the majority in the National Assembly.

## II. FINANCING POLITICAL PARTIES AND CAMPAIGNS

Just like there are many different ethnic groups, there are many political parties in Suriname. The situation with regard to this is such that one can say that on every 8.000 voters there is at least one political party. In the May 2000 elections for example 17 parties officially entered the election. Four of these parties namely the Democratic National Platform 2000 (DNP 2000), Millennium Combination (MC), New Front (NF) and the Democratic Alternative '91 (DA'91) were coalitions of respectively 2, 3, 4 and 3 parties<sup>11</sup>. Not all parties were able to register for the 2000 elections, since they did not meet the requirements set in the decree on political organizations. At this moment there are 33 registered political parties, which are more or less active in Suriname, but only ten of them have (shown) the ability to gain one or more seats in the National Assembly.

Add to this multi ethnic and multi party environment a “complex system of proportional representation using the largest average formula and preferential vote”<sup>12</sup> to get a member of parliament elected, and it will become clear that it becomes almost impossible for a single party to form a government on its own. Practice is that parties that represent the highest percentages of ethnic votes will (before or after the election) form a coalition and a Government. In general a coalition of parties (combinations) will last for one election period. The formation of pre- or post-coalitions of parties based on ethnicity has been so throughout most of Suriname’s political party history. (Most political parties in Suriname are ethnically based, but at the same time open for all other ethnic groups.)

The president and vice president in the Surinamese political system are furthermore not chosen directly, but it is the National Assembly who will propose one or more candidates for these functions. If in two voting rounds the candidates for president and vice president are not chosen with a two thirds majority by the National Assembly, a United Peoples Assembly is convened for a third vote. In the United Peoples Assembly the President and Vice President will then be elected by a simple majority of the votes cast. The indirect election of a president and vice president makes that campaigning in Suriname is not about a president, but about a party and their candidates for the National Assembly.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Article 75.1 Constitution of Suriname.

<sup>11</sup> See annex I: Parties and combinations that entered the elections of May 25, 2000

<sup>12</sup> Electoral Observations General elections Suriname, 2000; Electoral Observations in the Americas Series, No. 33; General Secretariat Organization of American States, Washington, D.C. 2006 2002

Fundraising for elections is centrally organized by the parties and if done by individuals, done on behalf of the party. It is the party who will decide about the allocation of funds acquired. Money or access to finances is as a result of among others the way funds are raised and how candidates for election are “recruited” and selected, a minor, and in most cases insignificant asset to have for both male and female candidates. Personal fundraising to back ones individual campaign in order to get elected is seen as out of order and against party rules of conduct. Parties also disapprove and discourage individual campaigning, unless silently approved by the party top. In Suriname it is the party who will advise their supporters on who to cast their vote, and history shows that the vast majority of the voters adhered to their party’s request. The result of this is that the chairman will always receive most of the votes in his electoral district and that the individual power of other members in the party will always be questionable since voters are instructed by the party on whom to vote.

### **A) NATURE OF THE FINANCING**

Political parties in Suriname do not receive any direct or indirect funds from the Government. Practice is however that the ruling parties will use the government infrastructure to indirectly fund some party related activities (mostly transportation and indirect media exposure). It must be said that public awareness with regard to this phenomena is such that nowadays parties will do its utmost best to avoid the media attention that it may cause.

There are no restrictions on the amounts of finances that can be raised by a party or with regards to the source of these funds. In general there are a few persons that will finance the major part of a party’s political campaign. Interviews with several of these party financers and top party officials led to the conclusion that 50 to 60% of the finances a party receives is in kind; propaganda material, T-shirts, banners, transport, party centers, etc. It is also not uncommon that financially strong entities will sponsor more than one party; this is especially so in cases were parties form a pre-election coalition. Several parties in Suriname will also have a branch in Holland and will receive sponsoring (mostly in kind) from overseas<sup>13</sup>.

All parties have a weak to almost non-existent financial administrative system and it’s also not the custom to make a year budget. Budgets for party activities are made and raised for the occasion it’s needed and in case of an electoral campaign in the last few months before the election itself. One of the major reasons for this is the dependence of parties on a “selected” few that are willing to finance regular party activities. These financers on the other hand are in most cases not eager to commit them self to activities other than short-term activities. Parties that are no part of government are as a result of this dependency in a much more difficult position to raise funds for even their regular party activities.

Interviews with party officials also learned that being the party treasurer does not always mean having access to the actual figures and finances of a party. In all cases the

---

<sup>13</sup> About 350.000 persons of Surinamese origin live in Holland. The branches Suriname parties have in Holland do not participate in the Dutch elections. The branches will have the same names as the Surinamese parties they represent; only Nether land is added to it, and will also have the same ethnic composition as the one in Suriname.

chairman is the one who is fully informed about the flows of revenues and expenditures of the party. This is not so strange since he is also the one who has the most contacts to mobilize funds. All persons in the board of a political party will however be informed about the budget needed for an election campaign. This budget is in most cases too high and most parties are not able to raise the estimated amount of money needed for an election campaign.

That parties have to build up election funds from almost scratch can clearly be derived from the information that they disclose in the year of the election<sup>14</sup>. This practice of having to raise large amounts of money within a short period makes political parties extremely vulnerable. It not only gives room for illegal funds and the persons behind it to penetrate political parties, but it also creates a situation in which a party becomes “indebted” to financially strong persons. The president of the Republic Suriname drs. R. R. Venetiaan called these types of persons “Tarantulas” and depicted as such the character of these persons.

It must be said that the Surinamese political parties has learned the hard way what it means to be dependent on only a few financiers that also lack political ethics. In 1996 the New Front coalition that won the elections ended up on the opposition benches. This was the result of what we in Suriname call the “Capital Coupe”. What actually happened is that two financially strong donors of one of the political parties in the New Front coalition (of which they were also members of the board) disagreed with the candidates the New Front coalition presented as their candidates for the functions of President and Vice president. Since these two candidates were not chosen in two voting rounds by a two thirds majority in the National Assembly, a United Peoples Assembly<sup>15</sup> had to be convened for a third vote. These donors, in a “two step strategy”, were able to convince 5 members of parliament to change sides and in the second phase, simply bought the “votes” needed from the members of the United Peoples Assembly, backed the losers of the general elections, elected a president and vice-president and finally formed a government with the newly created majority. The thus traumatized parties are nowadays spreading their risk by diminishing the influence that these donors can wield through their capital.

## **B) PARTY AND GOVERNMENT SPENDING ON ELECTIONS**

How much do Surinamese parties spend during an election campaign? In order to get an answer on this question several parties were contacted to get an idea of their campaign spending and financing.

Based on the information received, party spending on the May 2000 election campaign can be categorized as follows:

---

<sup>14</sup> See tables in paragraph on disclosure.

<sup>15</sup> The United Peoples Assembly is a gathering of all members of the National Assembly, all members of the Local (resort) Councils and all members of the District Council representing a total number of 836 votes. The presidential candidate with the most votes will be appointed as President.

Table: 1

<b>Categorization of party</b> <sup>16</sup>	<b>Spending</b> <sup>17</sup>
Most established parties	400,000-800,000us\$
More established parties	150,000 – 400, 000us\$
Less established parties	50,000 – 150, 000us\$
Least established parties	Less than 50,000us\$

There are several aspects that make political campaigns in Suriname relatively expensive. One of them is that 3 out of the 10 electoral districts are located in the interior of Suriname. These 3 electoral districts that are good for 10 out of the 51 seats in Parliament ( $\pm$  40,000 voters) can only be covered against very high costs. In practice only parties with large funds are able to adequately reach these voters (mostly Maroons and Amerindians) and therefore represent them. A second reason is that since Suriname has many ethnic groups, parties must pay attention to all voters and spend accordingly. To give an example it's not enough to place a radio or TV advertisement in Dutch alone, the same advertisement has to be placed in at least three other languages.

This mixture of focusing on ethnic and at the same time non-ethnic votes by most political parties, make that the costs of election campaigns are high. Parties are trying to make everybody as happy as possible. The Surinamese voters take advantage of this ambivalence and will collect as much “trophies” as they can from all parties involved in the election campaign. An interesting observation made was that parties that form a pre-election coalition do not work with a joint campaign budget or fund which would have resulted in lower cost for such a coalition. Coalition parties will however, share at the end of the campaign certain costs they have made, such as joint mass meetings, joint advertisements placed and joint propaganda material.

Based on the information gathered on spending for the May 2000 elections, we can now conclude that political parties in Suriname spent about 10us\$ per registered voter.

The government also observed the high cost for elections in Suriname. In a post election seminar organized by the government and the UNDP, Mr. B. Ahmadali made the following remark “... one should work towards lowering the costs of elections so it should not cost (*the government*) more than 10us\$ per registered voter. The costs (*of the May 2000 elections*) were in comparison to other countries excessively high namely 45us\$ per registered voter.”<sup>18</sup>

Neither direct nor indirect financing of political parties is part of the agenda of the government. Besides financial constraints, one of the main reasons for the government not to finance parties is the fact that there is a lack of transparency with regards to party finances and administration, etc. Parties and their financiers on the other hand do not want others to have a look in their kitchen. Party financiers and especially those who sponsor more than

<sup>16</sup> With established we mean the degree in which a party has a certain infrastructure to raise money within a short period, has more than one or two big financiers, has the ability to submit candidates for parliament, district and local councils in all electoral districts of the country.

<sup>17</sup> Donations in kind, which make out 50% and more are also capitalized.

<sup>18</sup> Mr. B. Amadali. Key note speaker at the post election seminar “Naar een Post-Electoraal programma voor de versterking van de verkiezingsorganisatie en administratie, democratie en “sound governance””, Paramaribo July 6th 2000.

one party insist on not having their whereabouts disclosed and prefer to stay anonymous. Anonymity however, is very relative in the small Suriname community, who finances which party is so to speak common knowledge.

It must be said that except for some academic discussions within the Independent Electoral Authority, financing of political party's is a non-issue in Suriname. It must also be said that the Surinamese taxpayers will not accept that parties receive government funds for their activities or for election campaigns. All studies done till now show that the large majority of the Surinamese electorate has a deep routed distrust of politicians<sup>19</sup>.

#### **IV. DISCLOSURE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ENFORCEMENT OF POLITICAL FINANCING SYSTEMS**

In 1987 the government published a decree on political organizations<sup>20</sup>. This decree not only provides for a definition of political organizations, but issues in article 2 sub a, that "the governing board, and in particular the treasurer and the auditing committee, should publish each year a report or balance of revenues and expenditures of the political organizations in the "Advertentieblad van de Republiek Suriname" (Gazette of the Republic of Suriname) and at least in one of the Surinamese dailies. Political parties are also obliged to make mention of this rule in their statutes. It must be stressed that the disclosure rule is only applicable on political organization.

In order to get insight how strictly political parties follow this disclosure rule, and especially those who entered the elections of 1996 and that of 2000, all newspapers and the gazettes published between 1995 and 2001 were searched for advertisements disclosing the accounts of political organizations.

The study conducted learned us that:

1. Political parties, except for the election year, normally do not adhere to this yearly disclosure obligation.
2. Practice is that one or two months before elections are held, political parties will publish in the Gazette figures on their revenues and expenditures.
3. All figures disclosed are more or less highly aggregated figures.
4. In that specific advertisement the political party will publish figures over four or five consecutive years<sup>21</sup>.
5. For the general elections of 1996 only two parties, the PSV and the VHP<sup>22</sup>, disclosed their accounts of the previous years. None of the parties that didn't disclose were refused to participate in the 1996 elections.

---

<sup>19</sup> In every poll conducted and published by the IDOS respondents were asked to mention the name of a politician who, even if its very little, they trust the most.

<sup>20</sup> Algemeen Decreet A-24. Decreet van 23 september 1987, houdende regels voor politieke organisaties (Decreet Politieke Organisaties

<sup>21</sup> The number of years published depend on the interval between the previous and coming election.

<sup>22</sup> PSV is an acronym for Progressieve Surinaamse Volkspartij (Progressive Surinamese Peoples Party) and VHP is an acronym for Vooruitstrevende Hervormde Partij (United Reformed Party)

6. Books of political parties are not up to date. Not all parties that published in February 2000 could produce an account statement over the year 1999. One party even jumped three years and only published the accounts of 1999 (their last accounts published were 1994 and 1995).
7. Except for a few, all parties that entered the election of 2000 disclosed their accounts. The political organizations that did not publish any financial statements had no problem what so ever to register and participate in the elections of 2000.
8. In 2000 all parties that opposed the ruling government, disclosed their accounts as ordained by the law. Only one of the parties that belonged to the than ruling government disclosed their books.
9. Political parties and parties of politicians linked to the Military regime in the eighties decreed the “Decree on Political Organizations” before handing over the government to a democratically elected regime in 1987. The study conducted learned that none of the parties linked too or founded by politicians out of that period has ever disclosed their accounts.

The general conclusion is that political parties who participate in the elections do not comply to the disclosure article which says that political organizations yearly has to disclose their revenues and expenditures by means of a publication in the Gazette, and in at least one local daily. The impression one gets is that those parties who do publish their accounts in the way we have noticed (one or two months before the election), are “playing it safe” in the sense that one wants to give as little as possible excuses to the authorities to refuse the party from entering the election. (The excuse if needed is however, always there since none publish their accounts annually)

One of the major reasons for this malpractice is the absence of a controlling mechanism or an entity where annual reports of political parties should be submitted too. Furthermore there is no sanction, and no enforcement mechanism to make political organizations comply with this rule.

Not having disclosed is in fact not even a reason to refuse a party to register and participate in an election. This conclusion can be drawn from the same decree on political organizations since it not only gives a limitative summation of the conditions a political organization has to meet in order to register for a general election<sup>23</sup> but also one for the grounds on which its registrations will be refused. The conditions to register for elections are<sup>24</sup>:

1. The political organization should submit to the Independent Electoral Office written proof of the decision that the party structures made to register for the elections.
2. The political organization has to submit to the Independent Electoral Office statutes, and rules of the political organization and finally
3. Political organizations have to submit a copy of the presidential missive in which he approved the statutes of the political organization.

---

<sup>23</sup> Only parties registered in the public registry have the right to submit their candidate for the elections.

<sup>24</sup> Algemeen Decreet A-24. Decreet van 23 september 1987, houdende regels voor politieke organisaties (Decreet Politieke Organisaties. Article 7 and 8

The only grounds on which this Independent Electoral Office can reject, and thus deny a political organization to participate in the general elections are:

1. When a party is not registered in the public registry of the Central Polling Authority.
2. When a party is not able to submit a membership list which shows that at least 1% of the total number of voters on the voters list support their party and
3. The two other reasons mentioned are: a judicial verdict declaring the organization an illegal one or a judicial verdict in which is stated that the party has ceased to exist.

None of these articles request parties to submit their accounts in order to be registered in the public registry or as a reason to deny participation in an election. The article is in fact a dead letter.

Since the article on disclosure leaves room for a very free interpretation of what, and how a political party should present the data to be published, parties publish little more than the opening and closing balance or an aggregated balance of their books. Below are several examples of how financial figures of political parties are presented (disclosed)<sup>25</sup>. The way the tables are presented is the same as how it was actually done by the parties who formally published in the Gazette<sup>26</sup>.

All advertisements in which the financial figures are disclosed start with a reference to the disclosure article in the decree on political organizations and end with a sentence in which the approval of an auditing committee, the treasurer, a special organ within the party or the board of the political party is mentioned. For the ease of reading we only reproduced the content of the tables published. The tables below are furthermore selected on the basis of parties that have a weak to strong potential to raise large amounts of campaign funds.

Table: 2

Political Party: Aternatief Forum (Alternative Forum)  
Overview of revenues and expenditures over 1996-1999

Year	Opening balance	Revenues	Expenditure	Closing balance
1996	295,294	---	295,294	-----
1997	----	----	----	-----
1998	----	834,500	834,500	-----
1999	----	1,465,000	1,170,000	<b>295,000</b>

Paramaribo March 1, 2000

The treasurer.

<sup>25</sup> All figures are in Surinamese guilders. Abbreviations used are Srg. and f. The average exchange rate in 1999 was 1us\$=1,400 Srg

<sup>26</sup> Advertentieblad van de Republiek Suriname A0 2000 no. 18 and no. 19

Table: 3

Political Party: Hernieuwde Progressieve Partij ( Renewed Progressive Party)

This party gave an overview over the period 1996-1998. In the example we will only present the figures provided for 1998)

<b>Profits</b>	<b>Sf</b>
Contributions	262,200
Contribution to party anniversary	6,685,775
Other contributions	<u>671,600</u>
	7,629,597
<b>Losses</b>	
Office supplies	327,615
Administration	1,211,075
Costs of anniversary	5,087,838
Costs of meetings	189,535
Other costs	<u>648,548</u>
	7,464,548
<b>Net Profit</b>	155,027
Cash	
Balance at January 1, 1998	187,020
Net profit	<u>155,027</u>
<b>Balance at December 31, 1998</b>	<b>342,047</b>

Signed by:

The Chairman of the party

The Chairman of the auditing committee

Table: 4

Political party: Nationale Partij Suriname (National Party Suriname)

<b>Revenues</b>		<b>Expenditures</b>	
Opening balance 1996	f. 98,577.51	Miscellaneous (water, energy, phone etc)	f. 2,131,059.78
<b>Contributions and donations</b>	f. 2,161,648.00	Party year 1996	f. 2,131,059.78
Party year 1996	f. 3,227,530.02	Party year 1997	f. 3,102,159.63
Party year 1997	f. 3,313,927.04	Party year 1998	f. 2,666,678.49
Party year 1998	f. 2,367,090.00	<b>Closing balance as of</b>	
Party year 1999	<u>f. 668,058.01</u>	<b>December 31, 1999</b>	<b><u>f. 518,275.58</u></b>
Refunds from Telesur	f. 11,840,460.58		f. 11,840,460.58

Table 5:

This party gave an overview over the period 1996-1999. In the example we will only present the figures provided for 1999.

Political Party: Vooruitstrevende Hervormde Partij (United Reformed Party)

Opening balance (01/01/99)	Srg. 2,630,841.00
Revenues	Srg. 14,168,375.00
Expenditures	Srg. 16,799,216.00
Total	Srg. 6,331,123.00
<b>Closing balance (31/12/99)</b>	<b>Srg. 10.468.093.00</b>

Signed by

The Treasurer of the party

All other parties who did publish, published their figures in a more or less likewise aggregated way. There is no reason to believe that parties that did not disclose would have published their figures otherwise.

When going through the published data, one will immediately notice that on the brink of an election, parties do not have many funds in cash. The party with the smallest account had when converted into US\$ about us\$ 80 in cash and the one with the largest had about us\$ 8,000 in cash. Based on the information received about estimated cost made on behalf of the May 2000 election campaign, parties had to set up an enormous lobby and fundraisings campaign in order to raise the amounts of money they spent on the elections of 2000. For the most established parties as defined in the previous chapter, which are also parties with the largest electoral support, this can mount up to amounts of us\$ 400,000 and higher.

The aggregated data disclosed, also sheds some lights on the spending made on behalf of the previous May 1996 elections. Figures on expenditures over the year 1996 will lead to the conclusion that parties with the largest electoral support did not spend more than us\$ 4,500 and in another case us\$ 81.750 on those elections. The “smaller” parties would have spent on those same elections us\$ 590 to us\$ 34,000 to us\$ 148,900. These 1996 figures, when put against the estimated figures for the 2000 election and against information received about the estimated costs of the 1996 elections leads to no other conclusion than that one should look with much skepticism towards these disclosed figures.

In order to give an idea how inaccurate and misleading things must be, we will look at the accounts published by the VHP in connection to 1996 and the 2000 elections. In the Gazette of April 2, 1996<sup>27</sup> the VHP disclosed its accounts and published a closing balance for December 31, 1995 of Dutch fl 100, Srg. 5,113,414 and us \$ 5,653.50. Four year later, but now on in connection to the May 2000 elections, the party disclosed their accounts over 1996 –1999. The opening balance of January 1, 1996 that should have been the same as that of December 31, 1995, only made mention of the Surinamese currency but now of Srg. 5,689,103.00<sup>28</sup>. Expenditures made by this party in 1996, an election year in which this party went for a second term, were according to the published accounts not more than Srg.

<sup>27</sup> Advertentie blad van de Republiek Suriname Ao. 1996 no. 27

<sup>28</sup> Advertentie blad van de Republiek Suriname Ao. 2000 no. 18

40,876,246.00 this is an equivalent of us\$ 81,752.49<sup>29</sup>. (This figure is 6.5 times more than this party spent in the previous year, but still 8 times less than their total campaign costs for May 2000). Based on the number of supporters that voted for this Party this party would not have spent more than us\$ 2.5 per supporter in 1996. For the elections of 2000 however, the treasurer of this party said to have raised approximately us\$ 300,000 in cash alone, not included are funds for campaigning in the western part of the country and funds raised by individual candidates on the ballot lists. Based on the numbers of votes cast on this party in the May 2000 elections, this party must have spent at least us\$10 per voter.

The disclosed figures are in most cases probably nothing more than the party's regular expenditures and some extra administrative costs made in the year of an election. One can safely say that the larger parts of the costs for campaigns held during election years are not included in the accounts published for that specific year.

#### IV. ACCESS TO THE MEDIA

Article 19 of the Surinamese constitution<sup>30</sup> refers to the media and reads as follows: "Everyone has the right to make public his thoughts or feelings and to express his opinion through the printed press or other means of communication, subject to the responsibility of all as set forth in the law". Since there is no specific media law, the last part of article 19 "...subject to the responsibility of all..." is interpreted in terms of article 17.1 of the constitution which says "Everyone has a right to respect of his privacy, his family life, his home and his honor and good name". Media owners oblige political parties that broadcast or publicize articles through their medium to respect these rules. These rules and the code of ethics for journalism as formulated by several international organizations for journalism form the framework within which media owners voluntarily operate.

This freedom as laid down in article 19 is in some way being expressed to the full extends in Suriname. Public awareness with regard to the freedom of the press is further more such that even the slightest indication of government intervention even at the government owned media will result in fierce public reaction and critic. The reason behind this reaction of the public and the press is a direct result of having experienced what it means not to be able to freely express your opinion, what it means not to have freedom of the press. In the period (1980-1987) that Suriname was governed by a Military controlled regime 3 journalists were executed, two radio stations and one newspaper were burned down, two news agencies were closed down, one news paper and several radio stations were closed for a short period and all had the experience of being censored or exerting self-censorship.

Intentions of the government to establish a media board have therefore and thus far not succeeded.

---

<sup>29</sup> Average exchange rate in 1996 1us\$ is 500Srg.

<sup>30</sup> S.B. 1987 no. 116 en gewijzigd bij S.B. 1992 no. 38

## **A) HOW DOES THE MEDIA SITUATION IN SURINAME LOOK LIKE**

On a population of 450,000 there are 3 daily newspapers, 2 weekly newspapers, 24 radio stations of which 2 government owned and 13 television of which two are also owned by the government.

All newspapers, television and radio stations give within the constitutional framework mentioned, room to political parties to freely express their opinion by means of advertisements, public interviews, and political party programs. The bottom-line is that as long as you pay you are welcome.

## **B) THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN OF MAY 2000**

The “Media Monitoring Team” of the EU, which monitored media access by political parties during the May 2000 election, also made this observation. In a press release from the National Press Centre for the Elections of 2000 (NPC 2000) this body concluded that: “During the period monitored (*by the EU Media Monitoring Team*) no infringements of national laws were registered. There was no clear support in favor of a political party by journalists or that journalist conducted opposition against on or the other political party. None of the political parties was granted free broadcasting time by the media owners, the state owned media included”<sup>31</sup>.

The NPC 2000 also made available the data collected by the Media Monitoring Team, which gives us an idea how frequent the media was used to advertise in. The data released will lead to the conclusion that the “grand old” parties in Suriname hardly advertised. The “new” parties did more advertising, while the older parties stayed with their traditional methods of mobilizing and communicating with the electorate by means of small, medium and large mass meetings.

One remark however should be made, the data presented through the NPC2000 leads to the conclusion that radio stations that broadcast in only one specific language e.g. Hindi or Javanese were not monitored<sup>32</sup>. The data collected by this monitoring team shows that parties that historically have the largest groups of supporters, hardly advertised through radio and TV or in the local Newspapers. A second remark to be made regards the state owned TV stations. The management of these stations do not accommodate political parties in the sense that they can broadcast party programs through their channel, short advertisements for meetings are allowed and in the campaigning month itself they will produce one special program in which all parties that feel the need too have the occasion to broadcast their message in a 5 minutes speech.

According to data received from three of the most popular radio and at the same time TV station owners, the largest parties spent an average of 5000\$ per party on broadcasting time during the election campaign. All radio stations that broadcasted the mass meetings of political parties and in some cases also smaller meetings did this as a service to the community. According to one of the owners of a radio stations that broadcasted life

---

<sup>31</sup> De West May 25, 2000. Press release from the National Press Centre for the elections of 2000.

<sup>32</sup> The Hindustani's and the Javanese represent approximately 38% respectively 15% of the Surinamese electorate.

reports of these mass meetings, political parties are only willing to come in with some finances to make sure that their last rally is broadcasted live. In most cases they look at it as a duty of the journalists to broadcast their meetings.

The fact is that during the 6 weeks prior to the election the media in Suriname were for the first time used in a relatively extensive way by political organizations. The result of these modern media campaigns in terms of voter's turnout was very poor for the party's that made extensive use of the media. On a seminar<sup>33</sup> organized by the Democracy Unit from the University of Suriname, the NIMD and the NDI, Drs. J.R.P. Krishnadath presented the result of a study conducted in February 2003. One of the key findings was that "50.3% of the voters were of the opinion that the best way for a party to communicate with the electorate is by means of meetings, 21.6% mentioned personal contact with politicians, 6.6% radio, 11.4% through TV, 6.5% through the newspaper and 3.5% by way of other channels such as family friends etc."<sup>34</sup>. One of the conclusions was that the high preference of the electorate for in fact face-to-face meetings with politicians is inherent to the patronage policy, which although under the surface, is still very much alive.

### **C) NEW DEVELOPMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE MEDIA**

With regard to access to the media by political parties two interesting developments took place in the last 5-8 years. One of the most interesting developments is that top party members and parties themselves became owners of radio and in some cases both radio and TV stations (or have a permit for one) enabling them to broadcast party opinions and programs through their stations. At this moment two radio stations are owned by chairmen of political parties, and at least five by high-ranking officials in the board of five different political parties.

A second development that took place is that almost all parties that take themselves seriously will have on at least one radio station a weekly program of 30 minutes. The choice of the station is mainly based on the ethnic group that is believed to listen to that specific station or the group of voters one wants to reach. The costs of these "through the year" programs is difficult to estimate since they are in general not being paid for by the party, but by a sponsor of that specific party or the person (politician) that presents the program. (Although not registered in the party accounts as donation, these paid programs are part of the party's propaganda policy).

In reaction to these programs of political parties several radio stations started to broadcast their own life programs enabling listeners to express their opinions with regard to political developments in Suriname.

Another development is that since 1990 opinion polls are conducted twice a year by the IDOS<sup>35</sup>. The major objective of the IDOS was to support our by then fragile democracy and give the people of Suriname the opportunity to make themselves heard and enable them to see where their own views stand compared to those of other people. By publishing these

---

<sup>33</sup> Seminar on "Beleidsontwikkeling bij Politieke Partijen" Paramaribo, Krasnapolsky February 28 - March 1, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Drs. J.R.P. Krishnadath "Development of opinion polls in Suriname".

<sup>35</sup> Acronym for Institute for Development Oriented Studies. IDOS is also a member of The ESOMAR (World Association of Opinion and Market Research Professionals) and as such follow their code of ethics and guidelines on Opinion Polls.

polls in full detail, the press played a tremendous role in letting these IDOS polls become one of the operational constituents of our regained democracy.

Polls however, are still not conducted by political parties and are also not used as an instrument to adjust policies, or attitudes by those who are in power. The public, the media and other interested groups on the other hand are expecting nowadays that the pollster increases its frequency in which it conducts polls so they can have access to accurate and unbiased measures of public attitudes and intentions.

## **V. GENERAL REMARKS**

Disclosure of finances of political organizations is laid down in the decree on political organizations, but is nothing more than a death letter since non compliance is not enforced. The aggregated accounts that parties disclose (if they feel too) only need the approval from the treasurer or a verification committee established for that purpose by the party. Controlling by a bonafide registered auditor is not required. One of the main reasons for not taking disclosure too seriously is that there is no institute where parties should submit their reports for controlling purposes; there are furthermore no consequences in case one does not disclose. The law does not provide for any enforcement or sanction

Parties in Suriname do not receive any funds for whatever purpose from the government. The people of Suriname will accept neither direct nor indirect funding of political parties, since there is wide spread distrust in politicians and their parties. Handling of finances and transparency in financial matters is not seen as one of their strongest assets.

One of the general features of political organizations in Suriname is that they do not have enough cash flow at especially the beginning of an elections year. Not providing government funds for at least the election campaign makes political parties extremely vulnerable to illegal funds that are eager to “invest” in these political organizations. Suriname is no exception in this. It is known that drugs related finances tried to infiltrate parties that lost their big donors as a result of the earlier mentioned Capital Coupe. In 2000 at least one party that normally gained at least one seat in parliament had its very modern and big media campaign openly financed by what the civil society in Suriname perceived as funds derived from illegal sources. The reactions of the civil society resulted in a complete loss of all previously held seats in parliament of this party and is now three years later still hampering the party in its efforts to gain the peoples trust.

Not providing government funds to political organizations results in Suriname with its multi party system in a situation in which parties do not have equal chances to reach all voters and especially those voters that live in the rainforest of Suriname. Only a few parties in Suriname can make the high costs and get hold of the 10 seats in parliament, which these voters represent. This simply means that the democratic right to be informed about political developments, goals and policy proposals of all political organizations that participate in an election is denied to these voters.

All political parties have free access to the press and except for the day of the election itself no time slots are applied on making political propaganda. Till now the media has played a minor role in campaigns of most political parties. One of the main reasons is that radio and TV give limited access to voters, since most of them broadcast for specific target groups. Campaigning for elections that focus on all voters not only means making the programs in several languages, but also on broadcasting it more or less simultaneously on several of the 24 respectively 13 radio and television stations. Parties do not have the capacity, the capability and the finances to do so. In the Surinamese situation parties that do not have the funds and organizational capabilities to organize meetings in all electoral districts or the smaller resorts in fact extensively use radio and television as tool to communicate with the voters.

The printed press on the other hand is, besides being one of the most expensive instruments to advertise and campaign, hardly available in the districts. The numbers of copies in which the three dailies are printed are between 15,000 and 30,000.

To conclude, we believe that in the case of Suriname one should focus on:

1. Institutional strengthening of the internal democracy of political parties and the education of politicians in stead of focusing on formulating a regulatory frameworks
2. Institutional strengthening and capacity building of the civil society in order to enable them to participate in processes of democracy and good governance. It is their voice, when heard frequently that can bring about transparency and change in parties, the electoral system and in the thinking of politicians.

Fourteen years of opinion polls in Suriname have learned that the people in combination with the media can act at least as observers and request correction or change in intentions or attitudes of politicians and their parties. Political parties are becoming aware that the political awareness of the Surinamese electorate is growing with a steady pace. We should hook into that development.

**ANNEX I: Parties and combinations that entered the elections of May 25, 2000**

<b>COMBINATIONS AND PARTIES</b>	<b>Seats in National Assembly</b>
1. The New Front Combination (NF) is a combination of 4 parties (governing coalition):	32
a. National Party Suriname (NPS)	16
b. Progressive Reform Party (VHP)	10
c. Suriname Labor Party (SPA)	2
d. Pertjaja Luhur (PL)	4
2. The Millennium Combination is a combination of 3 parties (opposition):	11
a. National Democratic Party (NDP)	8
b. Party for National Unity and Solidarity (KTPI)	2
c. Democratic Alternative (DA)	1
3. The Democratic National Platform 2000 Combination (DNP 2000) is a combination of 2 parties (opposition):	3
a. Democratic National Platform (DNP)	2
b. Democratic Party (DP)	1
4. Democratic Alternative '91 is a combination of 2 parties (opposition)	2
a. Democratic Alternative 91 (DA'91)	1
b. Brotherhood and Unity in Politics (BEP)	0
c. Alternative Forum (AF)	2
5. Political Wing of the Federation of Poor Farmers (PVF) (opposition)	1
6. Progressive laborers and Farmers Union (PALU) (opposition)	0
7. Basic Party for Renewal and Democracy (BVD)	0
8. Democrats of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century (D21)	0
9. Renewed Democratic Party (HPP)	0
10. New Choice ( Naya Kadam)	0
11. National Party for Leadership and Development (NPLO)	0
12. General Liberation and Development Party (ABOP)	0
13. Pendawalima (Penda)	0
14. Amazone Party Suriname (APS)	0
15. Democracy through Development and Unity (DOE)	<b>51</b>
16. National Reform Party (NHP)	
17. Progressive Peoples Party (PSV)	

**Total number of seats**